

*"This nation will remain  
the land of the free  
only so long as it is  
the home of the brave."*

— Elmer Davis



*Wes, Virgel, Bill, Jim, Justin and Me, 1943*

# Six Who Serve

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A **Veterans Day** supplement to the Sand Script

Nov. 10, 2006



# Reflections of solemn pride

by Lt Gen Gary North  
USCENTAF Commander

Since the initial Armistice Day on November 11, 1918, our nation has taken the time to honor those who have served in our military both in peacetime and in war.

The original Armistice Day celebrated the day that Germany signed a cease-fire with the Allied powers, officially ending World War I. In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson officially declared November 11 as the first official celebration of Armistice Day.

He said, "To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has freed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nations."

Throughout the years, Armistice Day has changed from honoring those who died in World War I to a day that honors all veterans for their patriotism and their willingness to serve and sacrifice for the ideals that served as the principles of our nation.

Throughout USCENTCOM's AOR, I see these traits in every individual from our battlefield airmen to our pilots and maintainers on the flight line, our doctors and medical technicians to our command

and control heroes and operational staff leaders in the Combined Air Operations Center and everyone in between.

Your dedication and willingness to serve in the toughest of conditions stands out in your day-to-day mission.

Each of you shares something with those who have served before us. You share the belief that we serve a calling higher than our individual calling -- service to our nation.

Those who know you, those who work with you, and those who care about you, are very proud of you. You have chosen to follow a great tradition, and you are serving our country with distinction. Know that America is proud of you.

We are as busy now as we have ever been and you -- each of you -- are making a huge difference in the defense of our country and those ideals we hold so dear.

On this Veteran's Day, pause to say "Thank You" to a Veteran. Let me be one of the first to say "Thank You" for your service and dedication to each other, your service, and our great nation...the United States of America! ★

## It is the Soldier

***It is the Soldier**, not the minister  
Who has given us freedom of religion.*

***It is the Soldier**, not the reporter  
Who has given us freedom of the press.*

***It is the Soldier**, not the poet  
Who has given us freedom of speech.*

***It is the Soldier**, not the campus organizer  
Who has given us freedom to protest.*

***It is the Soldier**, not the lawyer  
Who has given us the right to a fair trial.*

***It is the Soldier**, not the politician  
Who has given us the right to vote.*

***It is the Soldier** who salutes the flag,  
Who serves beneath the flag,  
And whose coffin is draped by the flag,  
Who allows the protester to burn the flag.  
—Charles M. Province*

## Six Who Serve

*This week, the Sand Script and the 380th Air Expeditionary Wing pays tributes to veterans across the globe by spotlighting a few of our own. Some are older. Some are younger. Some are in between. All of them make the wing, U.S. Central Command Air Forces and the United States Air Force the greatest flying force the world has known.*

*This tribute reminds us that it is the soldier – or, in this case – the Airmen, who keeps our wing flying, fighting, fixing and supporting operations 24 hours a day, seven days a week.*

*Take a look and if you see a bit of yourself in one of these people, don't be surprised. ▶*



# Dr. Mario M. Mercado

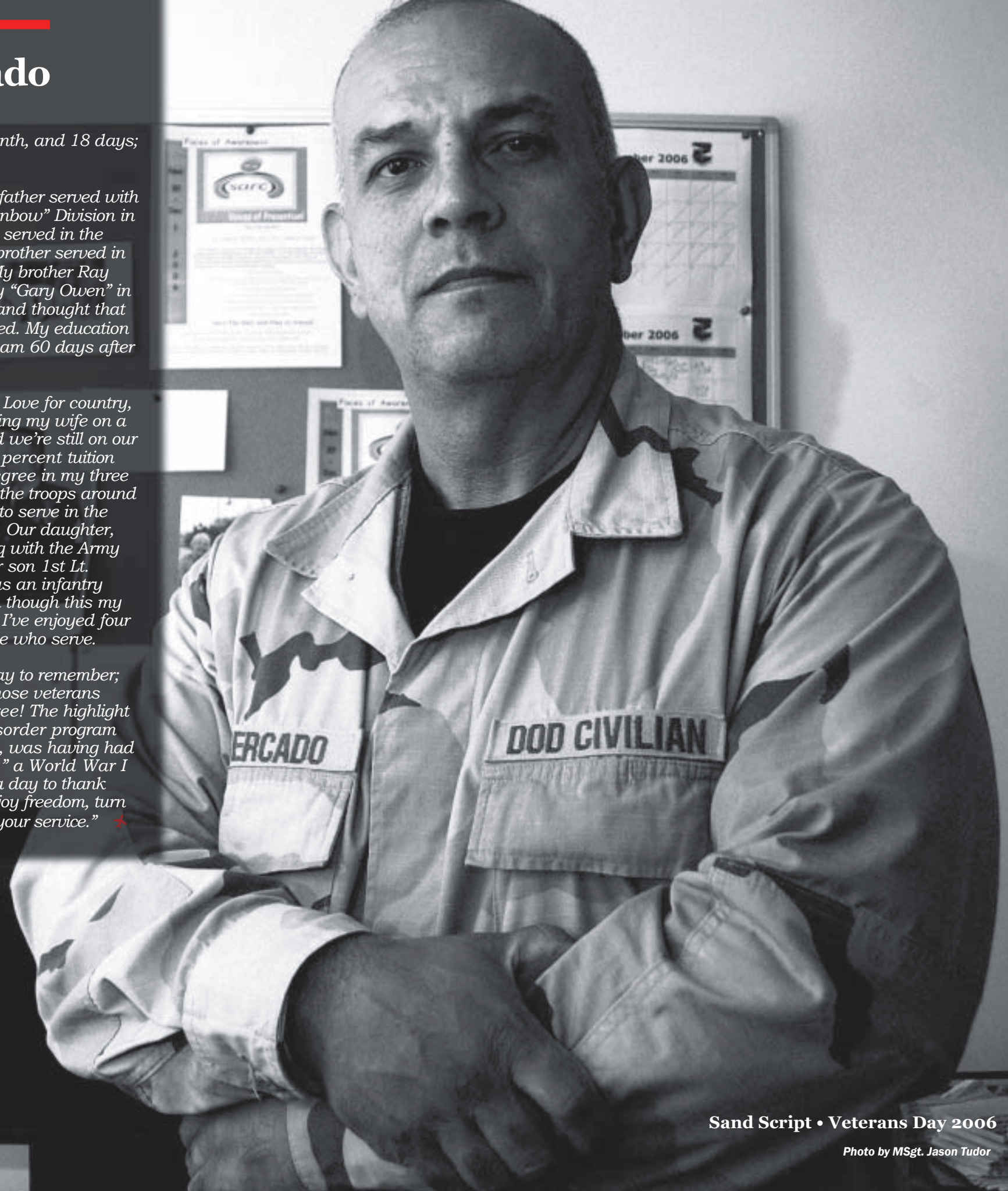
**Sexual Assault Response Coordinator**

**Years of military service:** 20 years, one month, and 18 days; civil service 10 years, five months.

**Why you joined:** It was my duty to serve. My father served with the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 42nd "Rainbow" Division in World War II. My brother, who died last week, served in the Korean War as an Army medic. My next older brother served in the Navy as a Corpsman in the early 1960's. My brother Ray served as an Infantryman with the 1/7 Cavalry "Gary Owen" in Vietnam in 1967. I dropped out of high school and thought that my calling was to serve as my family had served. My education came in Pleiku, Vietnam in 1972-73. I left Vietnam 60 days after the cease-fire on March 29, 1973.

**Why you've stayed:** I stayed because of love. Love for country, God, and freedom. My supervisor ended up being my wife on a \$10 bet. (She's still my boss after 33 years and we're still on our honeymoon). The educational benefits paid 75 percent tuition assistance. I went from a GED to a master's degree in my three years at Fort Sam Houston. I serve to support the troops around me and my family. My wife, Margie, continues to serve in the Army Reserve as an officer; a registered nurse. Our daughter, Mickela, served at LSA Anaconda in Balad, Iraq with the Army as a counter-intelligence special agent, and our son 1st Lt. Christopher Lee Mercado, is currently serving as an infantry officer in Iraq. I feel an obligation to serve, even though this my final trip in a uniform. Like the Rolling Stones, I've enjoyed four decades of doing what I love; serving with those who serve.

**What Veterans's Day means to me:** It's a day to remember; remember those who served before us; thus, those veterans have provided us with the opportunity to live free! The highlight of my service, as the post-traumatic stress disorder program director of a Veterans Administration hospital, was having had the opportunity to provide services to "Wild Bill," a World War I Veteran. He lived duty, honor, country! This is a day to thank God for the life and freedom we enjoy. If you enjoy freedom, turn to the Airmen beside you and say, "Thanks for your service." ★





# 2nd Lt. Rachael Nussbaum

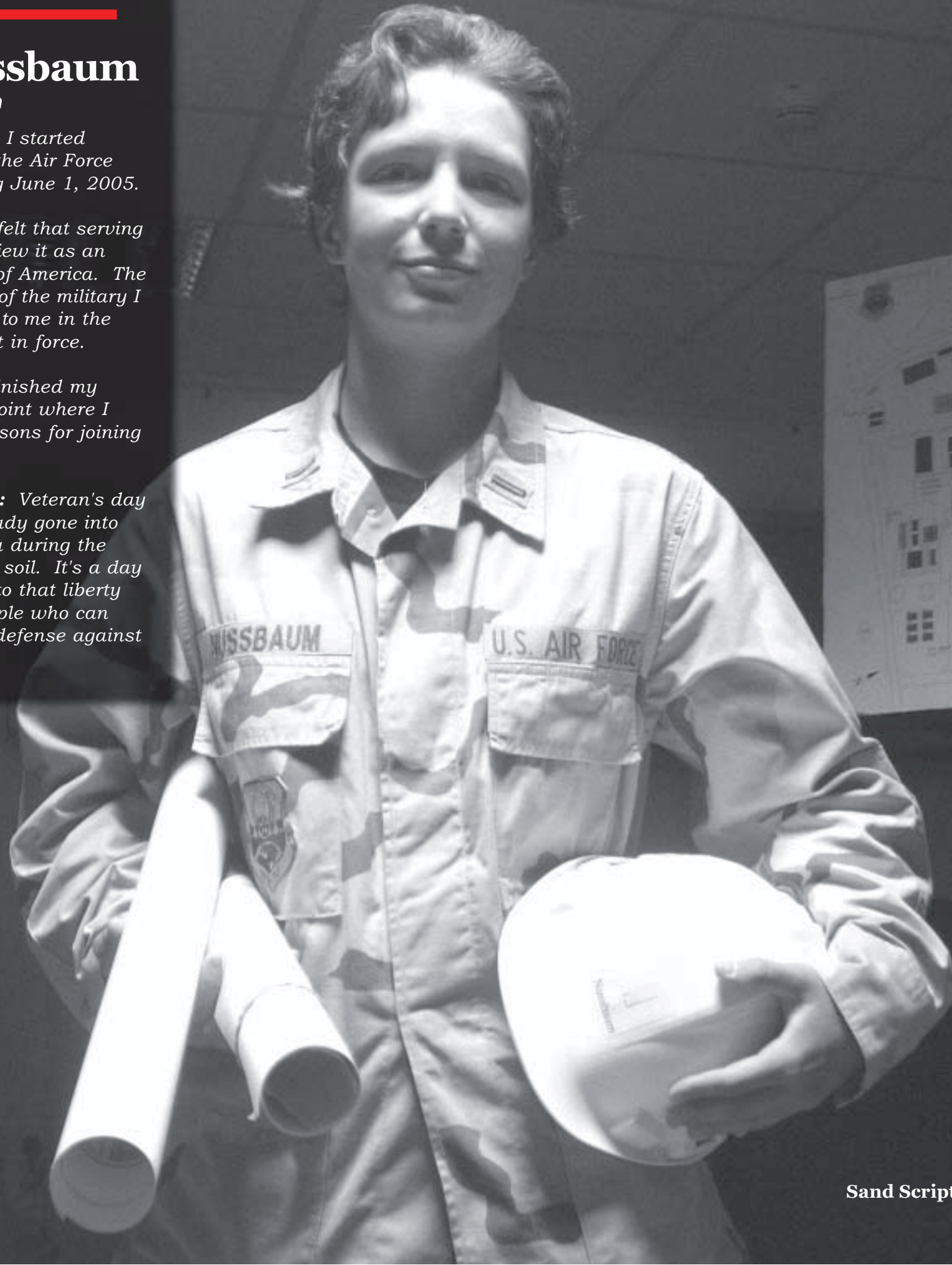
380th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron

**Years of military service:** *Depends. I started counting June 28, 2001 (as a student at the Air Force Academy). The Air Force started counting June 1, 2005.*

**Why you joined:** *I grew up free and felt that serving to repay that debt was important, I also view it as an investment in my future as a free citizen of America. The work I do now ensures that when I'm out of the military I can still exercise the liberties guaranteed to me in the Constitution, since I'll have helped keep it in force.*

**Why you've stayed:** *I haven't even finished my original commitment yet, haven't hit the point where I need a reason to stay in. My original reasons for joining are still sufficient.*

**What Veterans's Day means to you:** *Veteran's day is a day to remember how much has already gone into ensuring the success of liberty in America during the short time that liberty has had root in our soil. It's a day to recognize how many threats still exist to that liberty and a day to celebrate and honor the people who can perceive these threats and who stand in defense against them. ✈*







# Col. Keith Yaktus

380th Expeditionary Mission Support Group commander

**Years of military service:** 24 years, three months

**Why you joined:** Quite honestly, I joined because I could not find a civilian job after college. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1981 with an industrial engineering degree during the last big recession. Companies were cutting professional staffs and not hiring very many college grads; except for those with high GPAs (which I did not have). So, I ate some humble pie and moved home with my parents while my fiancé finished her degree at Wisconsin. I remember seeing an Air Force recruiting ad and making a call to a recruiter. He brought me in to take the officer qualification test and fill out paperwork. Within a month, I was accepted.

**Why you've stayed:** As I progressed, I enjoyed the challenge and was proud to serve. I can tell you that the turning point in my career was my second assignment. After completing my first tour at Langley Air Force Base, Va., in the 1st Civil Engineer Squadron, I was chosen to go back to OTS as an instructor. That assignment really "blued" me. I had a blast and the reward of mentoring and "forming" civilians (like I had been three years prior) and also prior enlisted trainees into Air Force officers was awesome. My wife and I enjoy the opportunity to live in different places and I was enjoying the different professional challenges and missions across the Air Force. Most of all, my pride in serving the country has grown over the years and my failure to find a job out of college has turned into a blessing for me and my family.

**What Veterans' Day means to you:** This is a day to honor those who have served and are serving. During my time here, I read the book "Flags of Our Fathers" which tells the story of the flag raisers on Iwo Jima. These men fought for our country through the worst possible conditions. They fought for democracy and with pride for their country without regard to their own lives just like our Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines are doing today. I will be thinking of them on 11 Nov. I will think of those who have died in battle like my Great Uncle Noah who died at the Battle of the Bulge and is buried near Gen George S. Patton in Luxembourg. On Veterans' Day I will be honoring all who sacrificed for their country to defend freedom for others.



# MSgt. Dean Riewald

380th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron

**Years of military service:** 19 years, 10 months.

**Why you joined:** *I recognized that I needed to get out of the routine I was in at the time. I was working part time at a department store and going to school at night. But I wasn't doing well in my studies and felt like I was headed nowhere fast. So, much to the surprise of my mother, I went to see the Air Force recruiter and it wasn't long before I signed the dotted line. Best decision I ever made.*

**Why you've stayed:** *Because of the good times, good friends made, and the many different experiences I've had. It hasn't all been fun and games, there have been some difficult moments over the years and being away from my family has never been enjoyable. However, I'm reminded of why I joined every time I go home for my high school reunion. My classmates with military experience quickly gravitate together with our shared memories of assignments and deployments to far away places. I also get a kick out of being the grizzled old veteran that the young Airmen come to with questions about how to things get done. Their enthusiasm keeps me interested in staying around.*

**What Veterans's Day means:** *As a young Airman firefighter it used to mean another holiday I'd probably spend on-duty at the fire station while most other folks would be enjoying a three day weekend. But the passage of time does indeed bring wisdom. I've since had the opportunity to visit World War II cemeteries in England, Arlington cemetery, and served in the base honor guard participating in the funerals of many veterans. So, as I approach the latter part of my military career, I now think of Veteran's Day with the special respect it deserves. War and the loss of friends are ugly things but so are repression and the loss of democratic freedoms. Veteran's Day is remembering all of those who came before us and made the sacrifices necessary to ensure our freedom. That's pretty special and I hope everyone can appreciate that. ✖*





# Amn. Ashelin R. Griffin

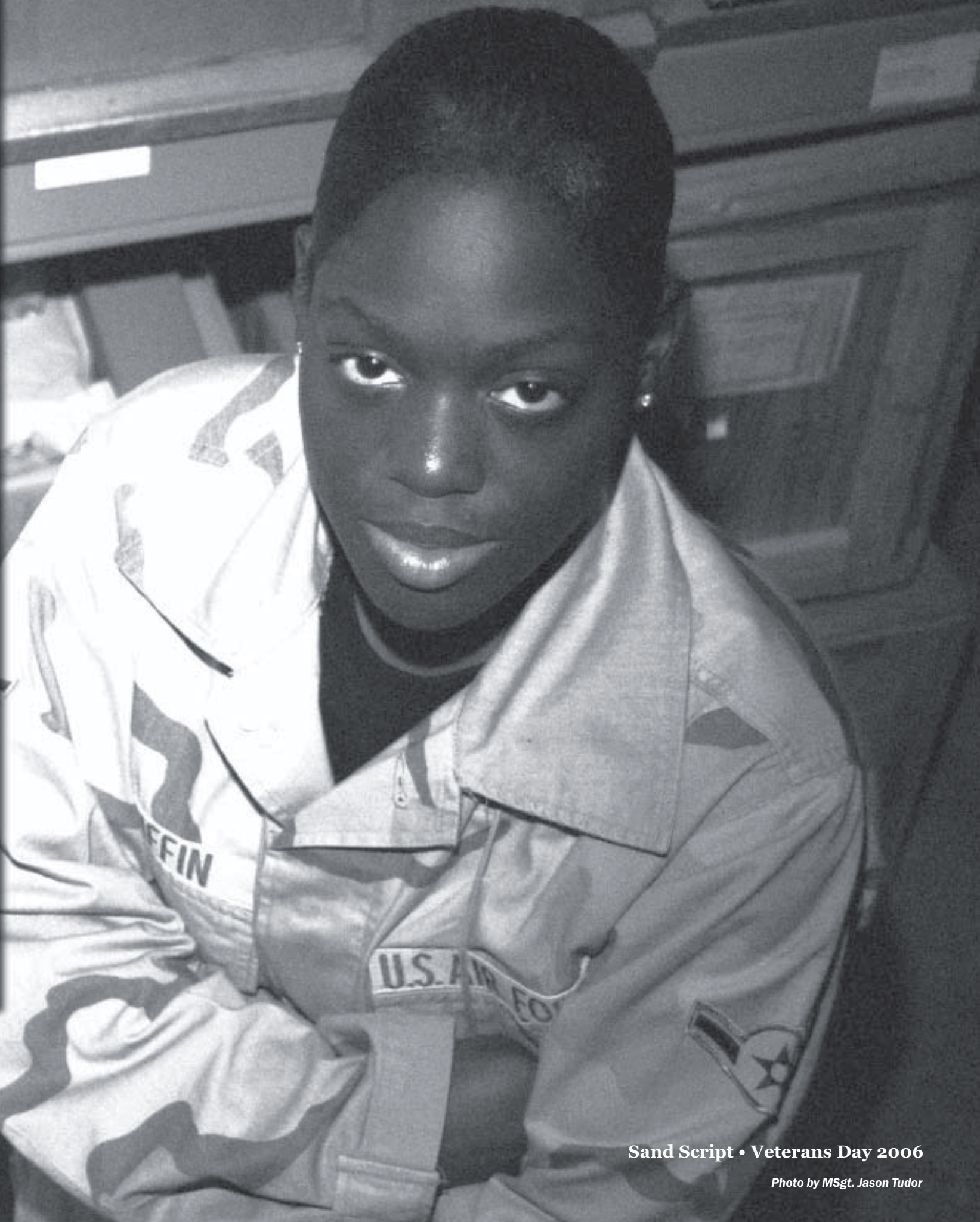
380th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron

**Years of military service:** 11 months and six days.

**Why you joined:** I initially joined the Air Force to travel. Now that I am in the Air Force it means so much more than that. I can honestly say that I am very proud serve my country. I never could imagine myself saying I would want to be an American soldier as a child. Today I am honored to be apart of the world's greatest Air Force. I can remember graduating from basic training and hearing civilians thank me and my fellow Airmen for doing what we do. We use to joke around about not doing anything yet. I have learned that it is not what we have done it is what we are willing to do. That's sacrificing our life for our country. Joining the military is one of my proudest memories in my life.

**Why you've stayed:** Although my reenlistment mark hasn't hit yet, I feel like being in the Air Force is where I belong. I have learned so much in the past 11 months. Although I can not predict the future I would be honored to serve for my country for the next 20 years. I find great pride in serving my country. To this day people want to know: if I had the chance to go back to college instead of joining the military, would I? I can honestly say no. Doing a job to help out one person brings a smile to my face. The feeling I get knowing that I am doing a job that is helping out my country is a great feeling. Everyday I put on my uniform I wear it with great pride and I'm thankful for the opportunity of being able to serve.

**What Veterans's Day means to you:** Veteran's Day is a day we show respect for everyone who has served in the military before us. Without those people I can not imagine where our country would be. They are the reason we are what we are today. It is a great privilege to serve in the same military as the people before me. I am very grateful for all the veteran's and what they have done for me and my country. I respect and will always respect everyone who has served and is serving in the military. Even though Veteran's Day comes around once a year we should never forget how far we came. Everyday someone dies for our country and everyday we have freedom in our country so don't remember the veterans one day a year remember them everyday.





# CMSgt. Kevin Carter

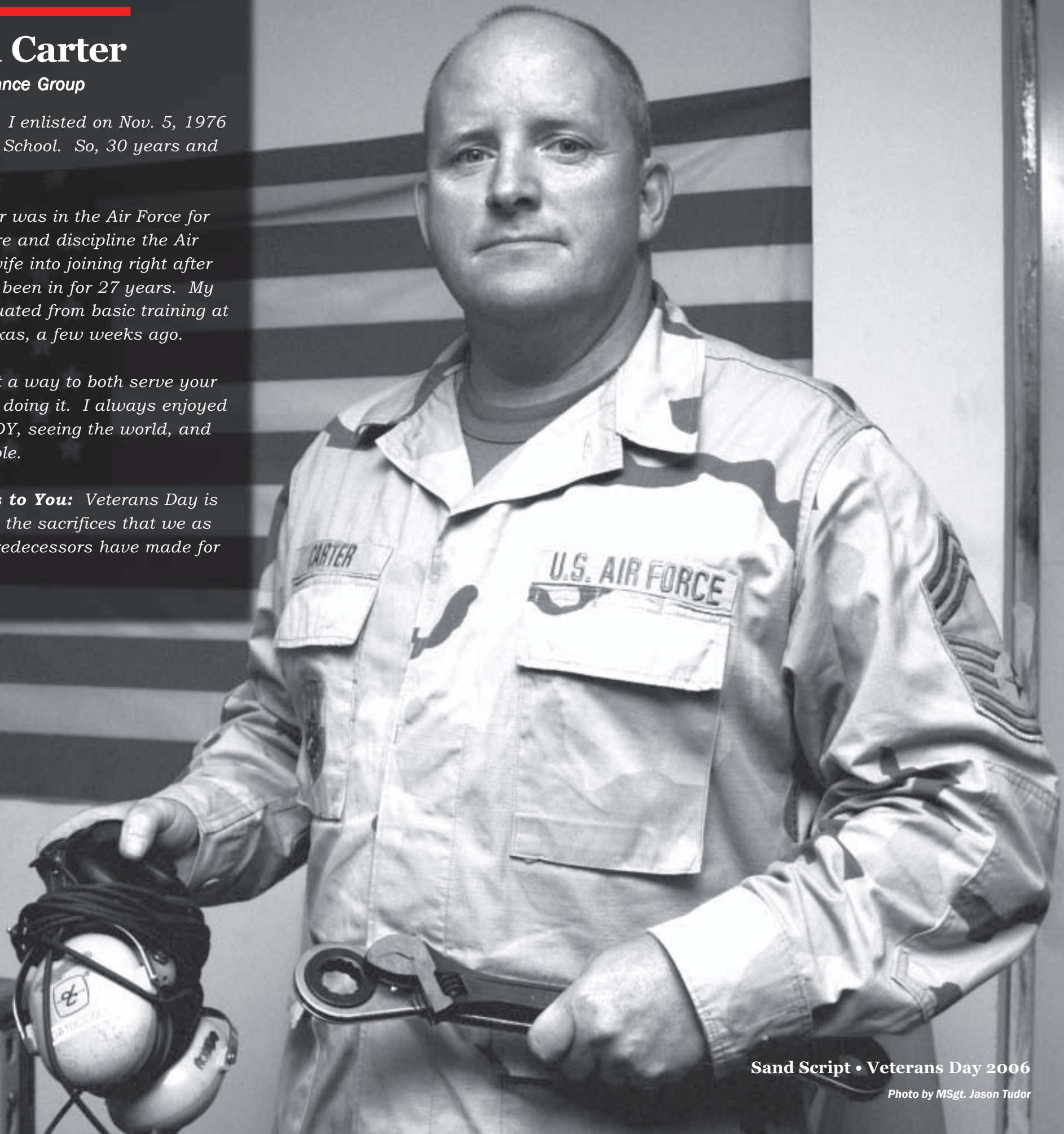
380th Expeditionary Maintenance Group

**Years of Military Service:** *I enlisted on Nov. 5, 1976 while I was a senior in High School. So, 30 years and five days.*

**Why You Joined:** *My father was in the Air Force for 33 years. I liked the structure and discipline the Air Force offered. I talked my wife into joining right after we got married and she has been in for 27 years. My son -- who is 19 -- just graduated from basic training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, a few weeks ago.*

**Why You've Stayed:** *What a way to both serve your country and have lots of fun doing it. I always enjoyed working on aircraft, going TDY, seeing the world, and meeting many different people.*

**What Veterans Day Means to You:** *Veterans Day is a day dedicated to reflect on the sacrifices that we as military members and our predecessors have made for our country.*



Sand Script • Veterans Day 2006

Photo by MSgt. Jason Tudor